

New Nomadism
Nothing is True

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Abstract

We live in a world that has been digitized, and it is now about finding means to intensify our perception of this world in order to navigate through it. Suggesting a strategy to expand our cognitive framework I will explore how media can operate as an interface that couples information with cognitive processes.

Keywords: media, cognition, radical constructivism, emergence, computation, nomadism

Introduction

Our world has been crushed into a sand of data, a “dessert”, according to Vilem Flusser. The grain of data is organized and ordered by us. From this process of organization we “construct a reality”, Ernst von Glaserfeld, that we use as a cognitive framework.

Since there is no singular or correct world-view or “reality” every expression or conceptualization in architecture is based on a given individuals reality. Therefore it is important in architecture education to expand the possibilities of perception of our environment. In order to do that we have to overcome two challenges:

The first problem relates to the interface to our environment, that as we know from Immanuel Kant, constitutes a break. In addition to

that the complexity of our environment is highly reduced by the limited capacity of our sensors receptors.

The second problem relates to the way our brain functions as self-referential network. As described by Humberto Maturana, the brain is an autonomous system that maps through an environment back onto itself. We are therefore constantly trying to match other exterior realities with our own, aiming for consensus.

If we stay with Vilem Flusser's image of the world as a dessert, this world that is crushed into a grain of data, opens up an enormous amount of opportunities to steer the grain and re-process this data "Post Digital" into an endless number of new realities.

That siring and processing requires new interfaces. Every interface can create a new reality that might conflict with our existing reality and therefore potentially advance our space of perception.

Interface:

The interface is a vehicle that allows the nomad to navigate the dessert dunes an interface that mediates and allows the communication between data and data carrier. This interface or media is a system that stirs and processes data in order to generate new realities.

Similar to the DJ in techno music, cultural references are first cut into pieces. Tweaking them, mixing them and layering them in any way imaginable new synthetic sounds emerge. These new synthetic sounds are as described by the musician Mika Vainio collected and then reorganized in new pieces of music known as experimental electronica music.

Similar to OVAL who painted small images on the underside of a CD in the 90s to make them skip we need to find methods of stirring information to construct new realities from pre-existing data.

Or to give an example from an 2nd year undergraduate architecture studio that I taught this semester at Georgia Tech, let us imagine a

three dimensional topography as shown in figure 1 that we use as information to activate the process.

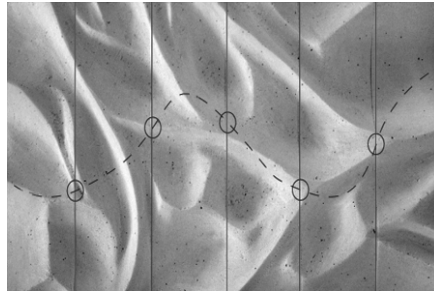


Figure 1

As an interface we use bass wood rods. These basswood rods have a specific materiality, form therefore a system that is based on rules. This media is now used to read the three dimensional topography. The result is a new reality that emerges from the interaction between the characteristics of the interface and the characteristics of the three dimensional topography as shown in figure 2.



Figure 2

If we would now move this experiment into a digital realm we would have to replace the materiality of the basswood with a virtual materiality. This virtual materiality is constructed as a system by defining rules and boundaries.

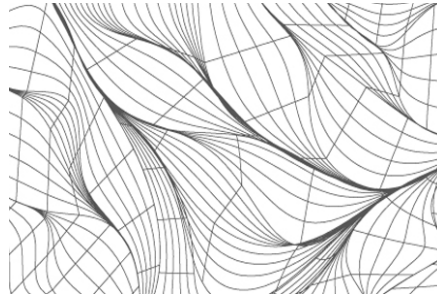


Figure 3

As an example we used the same three-dimensional topography as an environment, this time in the virtual space. As an interface we introduced a set of tools such as CV curve, a set of operations such as “snap to point”, “cut line”, and boundaries such as “no curve with more then 12 CVs” in Maya, a 3d software. The outcome was a different reality then in the previous project because we applied a different media.

Media in that way is not used to just represent an existing reality, it is used to maximize the chance of generating new surprising realities from pre-existing data which requires a shift in thinking from media being steered to media doing the steering. Since the media is constructed based on feedback, the rules and boundaries that define this “Post Digital” operation have to be developed in a constant feedback loop. In that spirit we could create an endless amount of different media and realities.

Advancing perception:

If we want to intensify perception we have to think of strategies that lead to a continual expansion of our cognitive construct. This construct can be only expanded by destabilizing it, which happens when we encounter information that exists in a contrary relationship with our own cognitive framework, or schema or set of ideas. This creates a state of instability. In this moment of instability we are faced with the task of balancing the harmony between the pre-existing construct, and the new contradictory one. When we successfully manage this disequilibrium our framework will be reconfigured and expanded.

If media is pregnant of new realities we could by continuously reintroducing new media and reconfiguring existing media generate an endless amount of realities. These new realities have the potential to upset our cognitive framework and therefore enable an expansion of our cognitive construct.

Conclusion:

As shown in the example above we continuously test different media, analogue as well as digital as instruments of perception. The goal is to use different media in a way to maximize the chance for new realities to emerge from the processing of information. That will destabilize our framework of perception, which will have an expansion of our cognitive construct as a natural consequence.

We are nomads, using media as interfaces or vehicles to navigate the sand dunes of our digitized world. The possibilities of perception have been expanded through digital technologies. From these technologies we can construct new interfaces that allow us to interact and communicate with our environment in continuous new ways.

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